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SUBJECT: (Optional)

A Dark Long Range Future for Israel

FROM:

Harold P. Ford  
Vice Chairman, NIC

EXTENSION

NO.

NIC #01612-86

DATE

31 March 1986

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TO: (Officer designation, room number, and building)

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The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #01612-86

31 March 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Hal Ford  
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT: A Dark Long Range Future for Israel

I am concerned that the long term outlook for Israel -- and for US interests relating to Israel -- may be much more troubled than the US intelligence and policymaking communities have yet appreciated. Attention has been drawn to certain of the discrete problems Israel faces, but the long-term challenge of Israel's many problems has not yet been recognized in either their totality, cumulative force, or very serious implication for the United States.

As outlined below, this memo (1) highlights the principal interacting forces which are eroding Israel's long run strength and stability, and (2) points up certain consequences for US interests and policy.

A. Principal Erosive Forces

1. A potential for rising instability. These particular -- and perhaps most familiar -- aspects of the total problem will continue to darken:

- Distorted budgets and severe inflationary pressures.
- The absence of political consensus -- indeed the increase of divisions within the Likud, as well as between it and Labour.
- Steady progress toward a future majority Sephardic population, hitherto largely composed of have-nots.

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I have discussed this memo with NIC and DDI/NESA officers, and have benefited from their counsel. The particular judgments, however, are my own.



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- The growth of religious fundamentalism.
- The growth of Arab terrorism within Israel and the West Bank.

2. A potential for increasing Israeli hawkishness. This, too, resulting from various trends:

- Some deriving from the above developments among the public at large.
- The possibility of increasing influence for Sharon.
- The possibility of hardening Israeli attitudes towards any West Bank accommodation.
- The de facto ending of any realistic movement -- on the part of either Israelis, Jordan, or the PLO -- toward a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian problem.
- In response to continuing -- and probably heightened -- anti-Israeli terrorism on the part of various Arab elements, an almost certain rise in occasional Israeli raids and preemptive armed actions.

3. A consequent tightening of the vicious circle of Arab-Israeli low intensity conflict, fed also by continuing chaos in Lebanon.

4. A context of increasing Arab radicalism, the product of depressed economies, Palestinian frustrations, growing Islamic fundamentalism, and grievances against Israeli acts of commission and omission.

5. A long term erosion of Israel's regional military supremacy. For the near future the most obvious aspects of this problem will be Syria's massive military buildup and the enormous rising military load Israel must carry. But the problem will continue to be one on and beyond the mere military balance: for the main problem of the Israelis -- which they also impose on the United States -- is their perception that they must be so strong that no one will even consider any kind of attack; if the Israelis lose anything in a limited conflict they consider this psychologically unacceptable to their strategic superiority -- a definition of "security" few nations can afford to maintain or even attempt to justify. And, Israel's security problems will become even more acute if radical Arab successor governments should appear in Jordan and Egypt.

6. A prospect of probable war between Syria and Israel. Assad is apparently determined on such a course, and the chances seem better than even that this will occur sooner or later. This could furthermore prove to be a broader war in the event other Arab states had -- as above -- gained new and more radical leaderships.

7. A prospect that war this time could include chemical, BW, and even nuclear weapons, and would be very difficult to bring to a halt.

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8. In sum, unless present patterns are changed markedly, Israel will probably come under greater challenge, at home and abroad, than it has experienced at any time since 1948.

B. Implications for the United States

9. The potential of being tied to a more unstable, vulnerable, and volatile Israeli ally.

10. The prospect of that ally becoming even more dependent on US assistance -- at a time when the (Graham-Rudman restrained) United States will find it much more difficult to sustain Israel (and other allies), economically and militarily.

11. Because of continuing close ties to Israel, a prospect of increasing Arab hostility to the United States. US facilities and personnel will be the target of Arab terrorism on a continuing and probably growing scale. US policies will meanwhile encounter increasing flak from moderate or previously moderate Arab governments.

12. A further diminishing of prospects for any negotiated settlement of substantial Palestinian or Arab-Israeli issues.

13. Continuing US inability to restrain Israel from dramatic unilateral military forays, etc., yet continuing wide-spread blame for the consequences of our alleged puppet's initiatives.

14. A prospect of somewhat greater Soviet influence in the region, as Moscow exploits heightened Arab grievances against Israeli hawkishness. This may well involve increasing pressures to admit the USSR into Near Eastern diplomatic processes.

15. In the event of another Arab-Israeli war, severe policy dilemmas for the United States, caught between conflicting interests concerning our Israeli ally, oil, moderate Arab states, the risks of escalation -- and perhaps, not least, a divided US public. Further, these dilemmas would be enormously complicated should initial serious military reverses compel Israeli leaders to contemplate the threat or actual use of nuclear weapons.

16. In sum, unless present patterns are changed markedly, close and increasing ties with our Israeli ally will over the long run probably confront the United States with substantially more expense, risk, diplomatic isolation, and Soviet pressure on the Near East.

C. So?

17. Without in any way being a professional crepe hanger, or an Israel basher, or unappreciative of the uniqueness of our Israeli ally in


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the Middle East region or of the benefits the United States derives from our alliance, one has to acknowledge that something markedly different is needed in long range US Middle East policies. Serious consideration of realistic alternatives is badly needed, now. This is in no way a new conclusion: it has been voiced by many to date; the only problem is that the US-Israeli relationship continues basically unchanged on its present -- losing -- course.

18. The central, obvious focus of new emphases must be a much more determined, much more sustained US effort to create and maintain good relations with moderate Arab government and publics, strengthening them in the process against radical political/social elements within and adjacent to their societies. This needed US change of emphasis means:

- Continuing support of Israel, but within a more even-handed overall regional policy.
- Willingness to meet legitimate requests from moderate Arab entities for modest levels of military, technological, and economic assistance.
- Willingness to say no to certain requests from Israel, in the knowledge that it has nowhere else to go.
- American willingness -- Executive, Congress, and the public -- to support such changed policies. Here there will be great -- albeit very difficult -- opportunity for US Administrations to educate the country on the stark realities of the long range Middle East future, and on the overriding requirement that US national interests remain paramount.

19. A possibly positive variable: Iran. The contingency of a decisive Iranian victory over Iraq, the fall of Saddam, and the inauguration of a radical Shia government in Baghdad would have seriously disruptive effects throughout the Gulf area, the Levant, and Egypt. In such circumstances new US opportunities would doubtless arise to help lessen the intensity of Arab feelings toward Israel, and perhaps find some avenues of more common cause against the new contagion.



Hal Ford

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